

## [The Unwelcome Caller]

September 20, 1939

Mrs. H. G. Moon (White)

645 Baxter Street

126 Milledge Ave.

Athens, Georgia

Bill Collector

By Mrs Leola Bradley

### THE UNWELCOME CALLER

Mildred Mooney is a bill collector. As I approached the house I was a little dismayed to find everything looking desolate, and I was afraid I had missed Mildred. The plain ugly little cottage did not have the usual neat appearance and the yards were rather unkempt. Just as I walked up the steps the door opened and out she walked with a broom in her hand.

“Come right in”, said Mildred, “for even though, as you see my morning's work is not yet done, I'm glad of an excuse to rest. John had a bad night so I have not had much sleep. Otherwise, I'm afraid you would not have found me at home.

After debating a minute, we decided it would be cooler on the porch, for it was a fearfully hot morning.

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"Before we sit down", she said, "let's go in and speak to John. He is resting now and will be so glad to see you".

Mildred's home consisted of four rooms, living room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen with a little eating nook in one corner. These rooms were furnished neatly but not luxuriously. Here and there were odd pieces of really good wood but much the worse for wear. Appearances denoted the fact that the Mooneys have seen better days, but unemployment, sickness, and other misfortunes have taken their toll.

As I entered the sick-room I was greeted with a cheery, "Good morning! How are you".

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Mr. Mooney was lying in bed all drawn with arthritis. He had been a sufferer for five years, unable to make a living for his family. At times he can get around with the use of a crutch or sometimes a stick but is never free of pain. His eyes were bright and he displayed a cheerfulness that made me wonder if it was assumed.

By the side of his bed was his radio, with which he could get the current news. A magazine stand filled with reading matter was in reach so he could pass the time away when unable to be up and about.

"It is good to see someone from the outside", he said. "Sit down and tell me some war news". Since I had not seen the morning paper, there was not much that I could tell him. After we had chatted a few minutes his wife and I went back to the front porch.

Mildred gave a faint sigh as she sat down. "It seems to me that if I could sleep one whole night without being disturbed I would be a new person. Yesterday was an unusually hard day with me. Now one seemed to have any money and, since I only get a commission, my day's work did not prove very profitable. I came home tired and discouraged and, of all nights, John had about the most restless one in a long time."

"Well," I said, "if I had to make my living collecting bills - every day would be hard".

In spite of all her responsibilities and years of hard work to maintain the family, Mildred has not lost her good looks. She is around forty-five years of age, and has brown hair, eyes that fairly beam with enthusiasm, and lines in her face that are visible only under close scrutiny. She always makes a neat appearance. The small sum with which she has to clothe herself obviously is spent to good advantage.

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The family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Mooney, a seventeen-year-old daughter, a married daughter, separated from her husband, and a little granddaughter of four.

"I married young", said Mildred, "and, while I don't regret it and I love my family, I do think young people should think more seriously before jumping into a thing that can bring so many cares. There is Laura", referring to her married daughter, "married to the sorriest man in the world. He has left her now and doesn't even support his child. Well, one thing is sure. I'll take care of her and the baby, but he had better not put his foot back here."

Mildred shook her head vehemently and I could see she was getting rather warmed up over her son-in-law, so I thought best to lead her out along other lines.

"How is Nancy?" I asked, speaking of the young granddaughter.

"Oh, Nancy is just as meddlesome as she ever has been. The child just can't keep still. And dirty! I have never seen a child pick up as much dirt, and a girl at that. It's just a blessing that it doesn't kill. And her mother is so busy trying to do our housework when I'm out, and sewing for the family she just doesn't have the time to care for Nancy as she should.

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"I'm crazy about my family and my grandchild. I didn't use to believe in limiting your family, but I declare to you when troubles come and money is so hard to get it's a blessing I didn't have any more.

"And there's Laura. s'pose she had more with that sorry husband of hers. I tell you no matter how much you love your children, if you haven't had 'em you don't miss 'em.

"Then, too, there's not only taking care of them while they are little but they have to be educated. Now, as for me, I didn't have so much education but I've managed to get by. I was one of a large family and my parents were not 4 able to give me more than just high school education. And we have not been able to educate our own much. Caroline, here, has had some business training and has worked some but is out of work right now. We do expect to do our best for little Nancy.

"We want a house, though, first of all and, by the way, we are fixing to move. This house is shabby and the street so dusty. I'm trying to get a large house and rent some rooms, for we are just obliged to have more money. We have never owned a home but we used to live in better houses. Mr. Mooney made good money when he worked, but our income now is so little we can hardly live. In other words we just pay rent and have a little to eat. Why, one hundred dollars a month would seem like a gold mine.

"Of course, I need a car in my work but I can't have it, so that's that. I walk everywhere I go. That's one thing about my job I like. I'm in the open and I get lots of exercise. Of course there's plenty of work I'd like better but I don't seem to be able to get it. It's honest but not always so pleasant. I've done other work before I began collecting. Why, I clerked in one store for fifteen years. After that I was without work so I applied for work on WPA and I worked on several projects. The first was a canning job. Let me show you something."

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She went into the house and brought out a picture. "Here I am in my uniform," she said." They made us wear white. See that cat on that bush?" I looked and sure enough there was a big white cat perched up on a piece of shrubbery. "Well, she said, "that cat died two hours after that picture was made. Guess it was the shock.

"Well, the next project I worked on was the sewing room and, boy, howdy, that's where my troubles began. it was this way", she continued. "I like to work when I have a good supervisor and one who knows the work, but sometimes they'll put some little upstart over you who just doesn't know what it's all about. And it goes to their head too, and it turns them fool. Well, we had one of them things. To start with I wasn't able to sew on a machine, so they put me and Mrs. Davis to cutting. We got on fine. They generally cut slow but the way we did we folded the cloth several times and would cut a lot at one time. We turned off work fast. One day that hell cat came and told us we'd better slow down or we would cut ourselves out of a job. 'Fool along,' she would say, 'don't be so smart.' I flared up, so I said, 'There's not a lazy bone in me and I'll be damned if I'm going to laze around here all day!' Then Mrs. Davis and I decided we would cut a lot, then the rest on our backs for awhile, so we tried that. That woman came around and found us sitting down. 'Well,' she said, 'if you can't find something to do you'd better go home'. I said, 'I won't do that either,' so she went for the head of the whole thing. She came and listened to that gal's tale. She didn't tell it straight, by the way, so Mrs. Davis and I had to set her right. The big boss told us to cut any way it suited us best just so we kept ahead of the machines. So we began again. After that she picked on us worse than ever. To start with I had forgotten more about cutting than she would ever have sense enough to learn. One day she tried to make me cut a collar wrong so I said, 'To hell with your collar. If you want it cut that way, cut it your dam self!' So I walked out and that was my last WPA job.

"Another time I was collecting some bills for two or three men here and once or twice one of them came to the sewing room to see me on some business. I found out some of them women were making catty remarks about me, so I had to get them told. No, I guess I don't

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make a very good WPA worker. I can't 'stretch it out' as they say. I want to do what I'm gonna do and get through with it.

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"Now Understand", she said in a more serious mood, "I think the WPA is doing a lot to help people who need it but, of course, it's only to give jobs to people who can't get them. If I can keep in a job I don't want anything from the government.

"Anyway after I quit, they certified Caroline and gave her work, so that was all the same. She's off right now. She was with the Soil Conservation but her job just played out and she's not been put on again.

Well, just look coming up the street!", she said in a surprised tone of voice. "If that don't beat all, there comes the 'buzzard' poking back here. That's my son-in-law I'm so proud of. Well, one thing sure, if he gets him a job and goes to work, okay, but he'll not lay around here for me to support".

I decided it best to discontinue my interview for the present so after arranging for another visit, I took my departure.

The following Tuesday afternoon, I went back. On the house was a sign - FOR RENT. I knew Mildred had moved. I inquired next door and got her address. I went just a few blocks down the street and found her number.

In the yard there was a sign which read - ROOMS, and I knew Mildred had started on her new venture, that of renting rooms.

This house was a large rambling affair in need of repair but very comfortable looking. The yard although neglected, was spacious and cool looking. I rang the bell and again Mildred met me with the dust cloth and broom in her hands. "Well", she laughed, "I guess you think

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I'm always after someone with a broom. I'm only raising Cain with the dust and dirt. Come in though; I'll stop a while to talk to you. I'm not going out collecting today.

"You know collecting bills is a funny business. You have to use real psychology. If you hit a person in the right mood they will pay their last 7 penny on a bill, but if you meet them when they are in a bad humor they wouldn't give you a dime if they had all sorts of money. I had a funny experience not long ago. I had a long past due bill for an optometrist to collect out of a mill worker. I went and every time she would put up a hard-luck tale, so I left off going for about three months. Finally one morning I decided I would try again. It was a terribly hot day and a long way and I had walked every step of the way. I knocked on the door and a child answered. I asked for her mother and the little girl invited me in. I just stepped inside more or less to get out of the heat. The woman at first tried to hide, but when she knew I had seen her she came up the hall fiery mad. 'What are you doing in my house?', she asked.

'I was invited in', I answered.

'Well, yer ken git right out agin'.

I kept calm but was burning down inside. 'I won't get out and you can't put me out. I'm not so large, but you put your hands on me and see what will happen'.

Then followed some nasty words. 'Let me tell you something', I said. I came inside for two reasons: First, to get out of the heat; second to keep the neighbors from hearing you. I was trying to protect you for I knew what kind of a tongue you had'.

She kept trying to get me out. 'I'll call my husband', she said. Her husband came out and was as insulting as his wife.

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"I told them, 'Now here I am. You can't kill me and if you did you can't eat me and if you could eat me you would have more brains in your stomach than you have ever had in your head'. Well, I don't have to tell you I didn't get any money.

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"Another time I had was collecting a florist bill from a rich woman. She had been denying it for some time, but finally she admitted that she owed it. One morning I went to her house. She came to the door and tried to shut it in my face, but I just put my foot inside the door and stopped her. 'Now listen', I said 'this is my way of making my living and I've treated you nice. Now you be as nice to me. When you bought those flowers the man didn't slam the door in your face, did he? Now you treat me with the same courtesy'. Well, I collected that one after so long a time.

"Most of the time the poor people pay up better than the rich. Funny to me how people will buy flowers when they know they are not going to pay for them. I have more florist bills than a few, and they are always hard to collect.

"Of course the wealthy people can always send a maid to the front door to tell you 'she ain't home'. One day I rang a door bell and a dumb looking Negro came to the door. In answer to my inquiries about her mistress, she said, 'No, no, she say she ain't home. Anyway I heard her say she didn't have no money. Lady, she don't pay nobody. I'se quittin' her myse'f.

"Oh yes, I forgot to tell you - abruptly getting off the subject of collecting - Laura's husband has a job. It's WPA, too. He's going to Atlanta today to take a course in Safety Driving though he will come back and work in Clarke County. That will be a big help. Now if I can just rent these rooms maybe we can make it.

"Are you keeping up with the war? I just wonder if we are going to get into it. The President says we won't. I'm crazy about Roosevelt, but I don't take much part in politics. Governor



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Rivers sure did have things in a mess awhile, but maybe if he gets the right kind of help he'll pull out.

“Yes, we all go to church when we can. Of course, I don't take any active